

# COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS WITH EMPHASIS ON THE ROAD INDUSTRY

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## Abstract

The challenge to the roads industry is how to involve the "community" in the process of decision making in order to better ensure effective implementation of development initiatives in the roads arena. Community participation is examined in the context of the emerging form of South African society. Key issues such as dealing with varying levels of authorities, and the nature of the development, are considered. The roles of the parties in the development process are defined. In particular the role of the professionals (engineers, financiers, institutional specialists) in road based development projects is presented as a subset of development projects generally.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The growing increase in the demand for community participation in development projects is not in question, and the roads industry, which is at the forefront of development in South Africa today, needs to face up to and accommodate this demand. This paper will put an historical perspective to the development process, look at the current and expected role of the various parties, and in particular the changing role of the professional in the roads industry. From this, guidelines can be developed for community participation in the future development process.

It is useful as an introduction to stand back from the temporal issues of development and community participation, and to look at the underlying sociological processes involved through the fundamental processes of human communication and community life. These will set the course along which the industry issues will follow.

There is a world-wide trend in society towards a de-bureaucratization of work and education, and the fundamental structures which have guided society in our history are changing accordingly. The re-emergence of a sense of dignity and self assurance in people is leading to a revival of community life. In this, people will increasingly assert their right to participate in decisions that affect them (Emery and Emery, 1). The directions that community participation will take, and hence the fundamentals of the community participation process that can be picked up by the roads industry in South Africa, are those directions that modify the parameters of everyone's choices:

- a) Probability of choice  
That is to increase the likelihood that individual community members choose as a matter of custom or personal preference the same courses of community action; an observable consequence would be an increase in what is termed community spirit.
- b) Probability of production  
That is, increase the effectiveness of the community's instruments, facilities and services, and reduce the proportion of the members with inadequate access to them.
- c) Probability of outcome  
Increase the outcomes that are possible and probable for members of the community; in

particular by increasing the range of probable outcomes for those who have been hitherto constricted.

As these fundamentals are put in place in South Africa, the role of community participation in the development process will inevitably increase. South Africa move to a democratically elected government in April/May 1994 and in the process, political empowerment and legitimacy have irrevocably shifted. This has brought a new dimension to the process of community participation. The underlying fundamentals discussed above are the factors that will force and shape community participation, and this can be used by the road industry to set its direction accordingly.

## **2 APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Historical approaches**

The historical approaches to community participation in development can be categorised into "means" or "ends" approaches. In the history of South Africa, development - for those who had been allowed to participate - has been based on a 'means' approach to community participation in which community participation was viewed as a method of achieving a specific, generally project-related, objective. Typical examples of this are the various public participation meetings that took place regarding the roads programmes in various municipalities. The problems that professionals faced in such situations were generally those of communication and transparency.

In the broader international context, however, the disenfranchised have tended towards an "ends" approach to community participation. This had its roots in South America where it was a tool for the achievement of political power by the poor. The poor represented the majority of the population and access to land in a rapidly urbanising society was a key issue. The political nature of the participation process and the negligible effect of specific projects on the process were seen in both South America and Asia. The issues that arose in the "ends" approach were: legitimacy of the authorities and the impartiality of the professionals, their transparency and accountability, and the nature and ownership of the development.

### **2.2 Unique nature of South African development process**

In the South African development process, the issues which differentiate between the two approaches to community participation ("means" vs "ends") are the legitimacy of the authorities and the nature of the development:

#### Legitimacy

The development process in South Africa had become polarised by the legitimacy (or historical lack thereof) of the development authorities. The majority of the people regarded non-representative government institutions as illegitimate, and conversely the government had not, until now, regarded the underdeveloped communities as a support base for political power. Even though the government at the national level is now perceived as legitimate, it will be years before legitimate developmental authorities with adequate delivery capacity are established across South Africa.

Eventually the legitimacy issue will fade away, if the experience of the ex-colonial developing countries is any guide. In such places, community participation became broadly a pragmatic attempt, initiated very often or at least influenced by financial institutions and development agencies, to initiate grassroots participation. It was not seen as a political tool. This concept persisted even when the government and its political structures failed to provide the degree of support expected.

### Nature of Development

In the project based participation exercises, the projects are developmental and are well suited to grassroots participation approach. In South Africa, the nature of development tends to be tangible and at project level; an example is the provision of roads and services which is well suited to a grassroots participation approach. Conversely in the South American situations, the nature of development was either legitimacy or land which were self contained issues. They did not form part of an ongoing development process, and the need for grassroots participation was therefore not as clearly defined.

What makes South Africa unique is the combination of the two different processes, and the fact that they are playing themselves out around projects. Here the nature of the development process can become the focus of the participation process. Indeed this is intrinsic to initiatives of the democratic government such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the National Public Works Programme (NPWP).

Thus on the one hand, a democratically elected government is in power and has established legitimacy at the national and, to an increasing extent, at the provincial level. On the other hand (considering "urban" areas), whilst a key issue is certainly land tenure, the various parties all see this tied to the provision of roads, services and housing. These require meaningful participation to take place at a grassroots level where few legitimate structures yet exist.

### **2.3 Proposed joint control approach**

Since neither the "means" nor the "ends" approaches are suited to the unique nature of development in South Africa, it is suggested that community participation should therefore be based on a new principle: that of "joint control" over the development by the community and the funding authority. This has implications for the roads industry and its associated professions.

Under "joint control", the role of the professional becomes somewhat more externalised, with a focus on providing impartial comment and technical input into the process of development. The planning approach should emphasise the process of participation, rather than the precise nature of the final outcome of a particular development.

Such a community-influenced development suggests a "bottom up" development process to determine the outcome, as opposed to the "top-down" approach which imposes a preconceived final product (Figure 2-1).

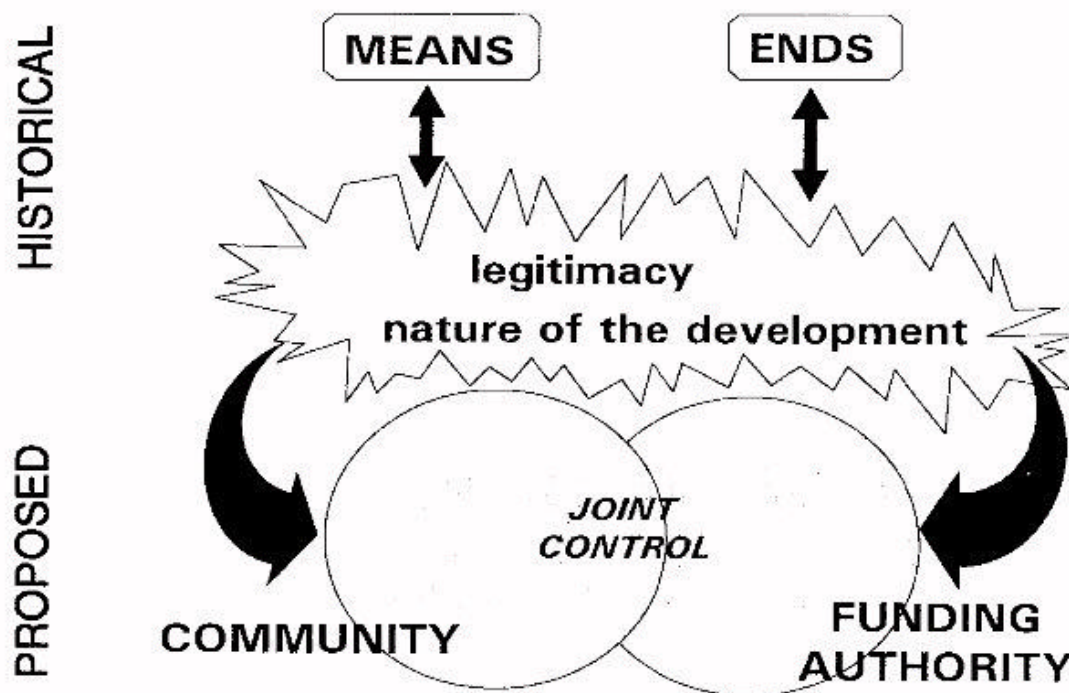


Figure 2-1 : Approach to development

## 2.4 Implications for professionals

Community participation is a requirement of the various development initiatives: RDP and NPWP, and as a result all professionals can expect to come in contact with it. The first implication for professionals is that they must recognise that:

- at the community level, both legitimacy (in the short term) and the nature of the development are at work,
- the process is interactive,
- the professional will not be able to work with grassroots participation unless there is, in the short term, political negotiation where it may comprise local negotiations with structures over issues of control, and
- these community structures are seen as the nucleus for legitimate local government structures and can be expected to become institutionalised in time.

Under the joint control approach, it is suggested that the professional should not put forward presumed desires, designs, plans, etc. for any long term development. Instead the professional should adopt mechanisms, structures, processes and concepts which should comprise a "bottom-up" community influenced approach to development, and should use their professional knowledge and skills to empower the community to participate in the development process.

What is further complicating the situation is the realisation that service provision can no longer be seen in isolation from the wider political and civic issues affecting the country. In addition to the political dimension, the issues of operation and maintenance, affordability and job creation all need to be addressed. These issues are all relevant to the roads industry, and their implications will also be considered in this paper.

### 3 THE ROLE OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES

The role of the various parties in the community participation process must first be briefly examined in the light of the complexity of the situation in South Africa. In addition to the community, the following parties have a critical role to play and are discussed here in some detail:

- i) local government;
- ii) community based organisations;
- iii) professionals;
- iv) facilitator; and
- v) financial institutions

Other parties involved are the national and regional government bodies, developers, and non-government organisations (NGOs: these include community based organisations, regional and national organisations on a statutory and non-statutory level, service organisations, and the like).

#### 3.1 Local Government

The local government structure provides the framework of technical and administrative support within which sustainable development can take place. In the developing areas, these structures are generally in a parlous state, with the technical and managerial support systems practically non-existent. Their local support is weak due to the past political process, and the fact that a high percentage of the population is unable to afford even basic services. This does not detract from the fact that infrastructure provision and operation require some form of institutional framework, and local government is the appropriate medium for this. Accordingly such structures can be expected to become more prominent in the developing world. This will occur through institutionalising the delivery process evolving through projects, through mergers with local authorities from the developed world, and through specific institutional capacity building programmes.

#### 3.2 Community based organisations

Community based organisations (a sub-set of Non-Governmental Organizations: NGOs) provide the interest group input into the development process. In developing areas in South Africa, the community based organisations have achieved considerable importance in the transition process. To appreciate the role of organisations such as Ratepayers Associations and Civics, who are all components of civil society, it is useful to first examine the theoretical conceptions underpinning the relationship between civil society and political society.

Civil society can be conceptualised as the matrix of private organisations, standing outside state structures and political parties, which embody different, often opposing, special interests and as the institutional arrangements which sustain the autonomy and the capacity of these organisations to act in furtherance of their interests (Wolpe, 2). In South Africa, the institutional base of civil society had been eroded by previous State actions prior to 1990. However, civil society continued to exist with limited operational space. If the intention of the State was to destroy it, it certainly did not succeed. Having made this point we can now return to the relationship between civil society, politics and the participation of civil society in development issues.

In the dichotomy between political and civil society there is the temptation to fuse together class factors with socio-cultural considerations. There are at least three types of citizen awareness of, and potential influence on, the political process (Budde, 3):

- the parochial citizen has little or no awareness of politics or his or her relation to it,

- the subject citizen is conscious of the output side of politics but has little influence on input,
- the participant citizen is oriented to both political inputs and outputs.

Budde (3) notes that while all political cultures are a mix of these three types of citizen, only the "civic culture" blends and balances these elements in such a way that effective and stable democracy can be maintained. By implication the political society alone is unable to maintain a balance among these three types of citizen. If this set of categories is true for South Africa, is its "civil culture" capable of blending and balancing the three elements? Political society here is referred to only as the political parties and the broad political forces, and excludes the State institutions.

Returning to the civil/political society dichotomy, the argument that authoritarian societies are characterised by the absence of democratic procedures in political society is an interesting one. The absence of these democratic procedures leads to sectors of civil society constituting themselves politically. In this case, "civil society" becomes fused with "political culture", thus making the distinction between political and civil society quite difficult. It is not necessary to say that this leads to the abolition of civil society, instead the institutional interests of organisations of civil society become transformed in the context of political discourse.

This does not explain how civil society can be differentiated from political society, but that issue has been addressed by Gerwel (4) talking about the relative autonomy of civil society, which has implications for the characterisation of South Africa's civil society both before and after 1990. Gerwel (4) wrote:

"The relative autonomy of institutions of civil society and the meaning and the content of the concept 'autonomy' represent issues which are going to be central in our debate about building and establishing democracy in our society ... At this stage ... I merely wish to make the point that the argument for autonomy does not mean that the shaping, the making, the changing and remaking, the development, the operation and function of civil institutions (and that includes universities) are independent of, or divorced from, the political forces in that society. On the contrary it is exactly in its essential inter-connectedness with those forces that the concept of autonomy assumes meaning.

In essence, Gerwel argued that society has to be analyzed in the context of both the concrete political environment and the historical development of the entire socio-economic setup. In the transition period, especially for purposes of reconstruction, the autonomy of civil society cannot be conceived of in absolute terms; rather it is relative. For this purpose it should suffice to characterise 'relative autonomy' as implying the ability, within a democratic environment, of institutions and social forces to articulate their institutional interests and aspirations within generally accepted political, cultural and ethical boundaries.

Development in South Africa is characterised by the lack of communication between the different role players. Where it does exist it is usually two dimensional. Prior to the late 1980s the majority component of civil society was not considered as part of the development process. Where any discussions took place, it was usually only between the politicians and officials (implementing departments). None took place between the majority component of civil society and officials, or the majority component of civil society and politicians. For sustainable development to take place, communications should follow the process shown in Figure 3-1.

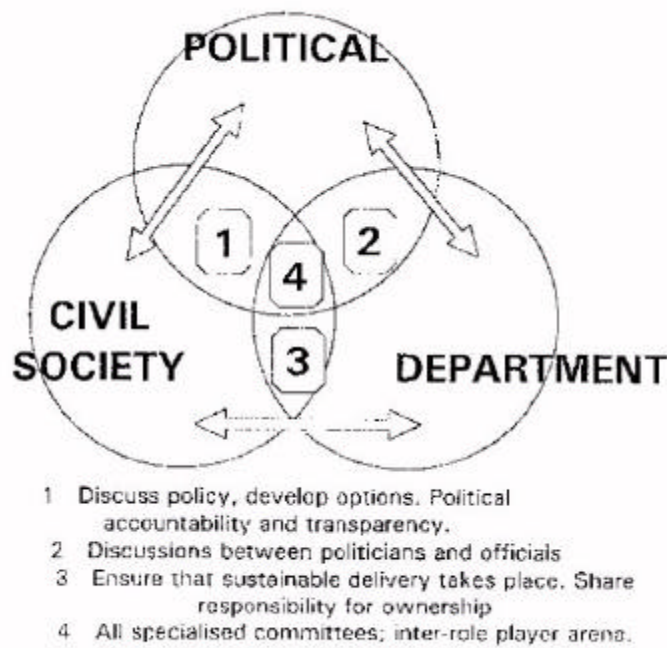


Figure 3-1 : Inter-relationship of developmental players

The role of the community based organisations derives from Keane (5) who argued that civil society is inherently pluralist. This is so, precisely because the ability of an organisation to achieve its ideal objectives is constrained by other competing institutional interests. Modern societies are characterised by a complex array of non-government institutions, professional bodies, business associations, trade unions, housing associations, residents' associations and individuals. This host of non-government institutions is positioned between the political parties (or movements) and the State. Of crucial importance is that there exists an inter-connection between civil society, political society and ideology.

Organisations of civil society may or may not articulate their immediate institutional interests for various reasons. They may emphasise political issues at the expense of their institutional interests as was the case with some black trade unions. They may even associate with the State as has been demonstrated by some churches in South Africa. This need not mean that they abandon their own interests. These positions may change with time as civil society is susceptible to political, economic, cultural and ideological influences.

Therefore it is not necessarily so, that organisations in civil society will always support strategies or programmes of particular political social forces. In terms of community participation in development projects then, the community based organisations will play a role which it cannot be assumed that even a democratically based political process, as embodied by future local governments, can be expected to play.

### 3.3 Professional team

The professional team in the roads industry can be taken to be the engineers and technologists who are involved in the design, and construction of road projects. This should not be constrained to consultants, because there is also a major role for contractors who can serve as project managers. The embodiment of community participation requires an altered approach to the role of the professionals. No longer just a technical role, it must be a wider role where the professionals determine the community wants (in contrast to the community needs), and then use their professional skills to translate those into the development project.

This is a complex multi-disciplinary process because it means that the professional's brief is no longer confined to technical or contract issues. It has to expand as discussed later in this paper to the social and political issues and the team itself may need to include sociologists and other non-engineering professionals.

### **3.4 Facilitator**

The facilitator can be a person or group, preferably independent, who is competent to operate at a level which would provide a "balance" between the social and technical issues. The role of the facilitator is help the community articulate their development goals and to empower them with the knowledge needed to contribute to the participation process. The complex interdependency of infrastructure in modern society makes the direct implementation of many goals difficult. For example, an improvement in health facilities by building a hospital is of marginal benefit unless there are the roads to access the hospital, and so a health based project may need to be preceded by a transport based project.

### **3.5 Financial institutions**

The financial institutions play a role at both the macro-economic level and the project level. At the macroeconomic level, the financial institution is able to focus on strategic issues such employment creation and economic empowerment by, for example, directing investment so that the productive capacity of the economy becomes more labour-using over time (Jackson and Muller, 6). This has been the perceived role of institutions such as the Development Bank of southern Africa, and while it can be expected to continue, there will be a closer alignment of financial institutions and government macroeconomic policy over time. At the project level, the financial institution role lies in direct intervention in the development process to ensure appropriate community participation.

## **4 ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL IN THE ROADS INDUSTRY**

### **4.1 Background**

The traditional role of the professional team has been technically and financially focused on the design and construction of projects. This will continue, but the role will be expanded to encompass socio-political issues. In doing so, professionals need to be aware of the constraints of:

- role definition within the project,
- the role of the project manager in the development process and the conflict between "process" and "product", and
- internal community problems.

This section will attempt to define the role for the professional team in development projects in the roads industry in the light of these constraints. Of course the role is not confined to the roads industry, and can be expanded to other industries in the development arena.

The issues connected with the failings of the present system affect the professional working in development, who is increasingly being given a pivotal role. This in turn raises questions about the:

- need for the professional to become involved in the political process,
- exact nature of the professional's role in this changing environment,
- problems associated with the bias of the traditional appointment system, whereby the professional is appointed by the controlling authority, and
- degree of actual authority that the professional has to act in this type of environment.



The questions can be answered and the role defined for both the design and construction stages of the process.

## **4.2 Design stage**

The design stage is the first step of the development process, and it is usually here that the traditional role of the professional has already put community participation onto a bad footing. The professional team are often appointed to do a design without the necessary authority to investigate the particular feasibility. The external professionals (the consultants and management contractors) are generally not included in the decision about what is to be done. If in the course of the preliminary design, it is found that a community does not want say a surfaced bus route, but would prefer to have all unsurfaced roads better maintained, or even to have an underground sewerage system, the professional is in an invidious position of either declining the appointment or doing what they are told to do.

With increasing community participation, it is more and more likely that alternate priorities will be identified, and the professional's ability to state these priorities and to influence decisions needs to be reinforced (Crosswell, 4). However in reviewing the various projects discussed at the 1993 Midrand Symposium on Labour Based Construction, there were all too few which considered either community participation or the adjuncts discussed here of a pre-feasibility report or skills linkages. The paradigm persisted that the decisions are made by local government or central government - "top-down" approach

### **4.2.1 Pre-feasibility report**

The need for what has been termed a pre-feasibility report was initially identified in the labour based project arena (Crosswell, 4). At the pre-feasibility stage for labour based construction, the professional ensures that the project can be constructed by hand, that the beneficiary community both wants the project and is capable and willing to construct it. This approach is considered equally applicable to community participation in all development projects and serves the important role of bringing the community into the project in the pre-design stage.

### **4.2.2 Building skills relationships**

The community input into decision-making in development depends on the professionals building skills linkages. There is often a major knowledge divide between those parties responsible for design and implementation of a development project and those in the community responsible for decision making together with their broader constituency. This relates to the underlying dichotomy which exists between a means approach to community participation and the ends approach.

The role of the professional team here is to empower the community with the technical knowledge needed to effectively participate through building skills linkages. This requires a very different mind set to that prevailing in the professional community at present. In the participation process, it is not adequate for the professional to simply announce decisions based on professional experience and judgement and couched in professional jargon; communications and reports have to be translated from 'Professional Speak' into 'Community English'. This involves no less complicated words or sentence construction, but rather explaining the proposals in a more understandable manner.

In building skills linkages, the professionals together with facilitator assist the community to understand its desires and to define its goals. In this process, the communities are informed of the relevant facts, shown the consequences of particular goals, and the conflicts and inequities which their development might create are itemised. This is particularly true when a project oriented development process such as upgrading gravel roads to a surfaced standard is considered in relation to the broader community goals such as economic and social growth, urban and regional development. A major difficulty is that the community has been historically slow to state its objectives in terms useful to professionals, and having done so, is likely to change those objectives (Lay, 8).

#### **4.2.3 Building and maintaining relationships between the parties**

In the design stage, effective community participation necessitates a shared goal or ideal on the part of the various parties involved which includes the issue of agendas. However, even when agendas are known there are a large number of other factors which will influence the success of the participation process, and professionals (and facilitators) need to be aware of these potential problems and constraints. The constraints usually pertain to the relationship between the different parties involved in the process, the internal tensions within the various parties themselves, and the external environment. The professional should therefore have a reasonable understanding at least of the following areas of interest:

- an understanding of the broader political spectrum and acceptance of the legitimacy of other parties views;
- the development of social interactive skills, and the understanding of group dynamics and how to facilitate the particular process;
- the development of conflict resolution and negotiation skills;
- an understanding of the role of the facilitator, and how the process of facilitation works;
- the need for raising and awareness of development issues in communities, and imparting technical knowledge in a down to earth way.

#### **4.3 Construction stage**

During the construction stage, the role of the professional is likely to need changing from that usually defined in contracting relationships. The obvious changes are project specific variations, such as setting wage rate, working hours, and choosing labourers when labour based construction is used. In the case of labour based construction with the consultant as project manager, the change can be even more radical (Crosswell, 7).

In all cases however, the professional role will include the need to build and maintain relationships between the parties, as discussed above. Since contractors will become more heavily involved in this stage, their professionals must also pick up on this role. Community tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise with time, are sure to occur during the months or years of construction, and need to be resolved to keep the construction process on track. One successful way of tackling this is to maintain the community participation structures that were established at the pre-feasibility stage. Examples exist of the benefits of maintaining a "development committee" to act as liaison between the professionals, community and labourers ensuring that community participation continues throughout the project (Markham, 9).

### **5 INTERACTION WITH OTHER ROAD INDUSTRY INITIATIVES**

The community participation process must not be viewed in isolation from other dynamics in the development process. The Reconstruction and Development Programme will exert a substantial influence on the development process. There are a number of road industry initiatives which are changing the way that road infrastructure is planned, designed, constructed and maintained. These include labour based construction, development of local entrepreneurs, appropriate standards for roads, sustainability and institutional capacity building. The process of community participation is intertwined with these initiatives, and the first two will be discussed here briefly to illustrate this:

#### **Labour based construction**

The concept of labour based (or intensive or enhanced) construction is actively being implemented by the civil engineering profession (Power, 10), and the roads industry is one of the leaders. It is being supported by the National Public Works Programme. A foundation stone of success for labour based construction is community participation and this is clearly recognised. As said in SABITA Manual 11 (11):

"Nothing will work in the community unless it has community acceptance, and this is especially true in developing communities. This means that there must be consultation and agreement with the community before any implementation attempt is made. Only then will the project be accepted and be likely to succeed. This applies to plant based construction as much as labour based construction"

Another example is in the Framework Agreement between Cosatu and the civil engineering industry on labour based methods which includes provision that there be a high degree of community participation in the conception, planning and implementation of public works projects as well as enhancing the capacity of the community (Ruiters, 12).

#### Development of emerging entrepreneurs

The application of labour based construction on its own within the framework of traditional engineering systems is now being understood to be inadequate from the community's viewpoint. For example, the Initial Programme by the Soweto City Engineer's Department using labour based construction in Services Upgrading, was termed a failure from the community's viewpoint even though it was engineeringly correct (Watermeyer and Davis, 13). The problems were that:

- unemployment levels were the same after construction as they had been before,
- little or no transference of skills took place, and
- the expenditure retained within the community was negligible.

To overcome this, the focus has moved beyond that of simply using labour for construction in engineering, and towards that of business and community development (such as Davis, 14) in which community participation plays a big role. These embrace the development of emerging entrepreneurs in which various schemes embrace issues such as the operational aspects of people management and financial management, and the business aspects such as tendering and marketing.

## **6 GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION**

There is no specific or right way to ensure community participation in the development process. The guidelines presented below are not to be regarded as complete or typical of the requirements of the community participation process, nor are they prioritised. However they represent a departure point for community participation at the present time, and embody the principles of joint control set out above. As the community develops its sense of ownership, and the relativity between the various civil and political structures changes, then the guidelines will change.

- a) Define project
- b) Identify main players
- c) Organise public meetings
- d) Re-assess project definition
- e) Establish working structures to introduce joint control
- f) Survey
- g) Grassroots involvement
- h) Identify perceptions and different agendas within community interest groups
- i) Establish enabling/empowerment programmes (skills linkages)
- j) Continuous feedback
- k) Ultimate responsibility
- l) Ongoing monitoring

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

A prominent feature of public life since the mid eighties has been an increasing demand by people to participate in and influence the formulation and making of decisions directly affecting the quality of their living environment. The unique nature of the historical process in South Africa makes the adoption of previous solutions to community participation wrong, and a new approach of joint control is proposed.

This requires a multi-disciplinary approach because, more important than the technical content, is the **process** leading to the adoption of the new development. It is imperative that this process involves the maximum possible participation by the components of civil society in order to achieve the required acceptance level for the preferred option.

The role of the professional needs to expand and be adapted to meet these goals. At the start of the development process, a need for a pre-feasibility report is identified. In the design process, it is imperative that the broader community is empowered to participate effectively through skills linkages. During the design and construction process, the professional has a key role in building and maintaining relationships between parties.

The community participation process is intertwined with other dynamics in the development process such as the RDP, and in particular must be seen in the perspective of other road industry initiatives such as labour based construction, development of emerging entrepreneurs, appropriate standards for roads, sustainability and institutional capacity building.

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